

*Government Orders*

• (1130)

The 700,000 Quebecers who use provincial social assistance programs deserve to see the federal government's contribution, almost \$3 billion each year, used in the most flexible and productive way possible.

The half million UI claimants in Quebec each month deserve the best possible service in their quest to get back into the workforce.

The 400,000 Quebecers who benefited from the department's employment programs and services deserve to see those programs become more effective, more flexible, more focused on their needs.

The 850,000 Quebec seniors deserve to benefit from improved access and service that will be available as the department builds its new service delivery system.

Every Quebecer deserves more than the status quo. Bill C-96 is about moving beyond the status quo to something better, to more responsive programs and services, better programs and services designed and delivered at the community level, where they can make a difference.

Bill C-96 will strengthen partnerships and decentralize power even further and let Quebecers make the decisions about what kinds of programs and services make sense in their communities.

We have made enormous progress over the last year in the pioneering of this approach, fundamentally rethinking and redoing the way HRDC works in communities in Quebec and across Canada. We are making enormous progress in working with the provinces to provide the most flexible services possible to all Canadians. Consider, for example, the Canada health and social transfer, which will replace the old Canada assistance plan. The whole point of this CHST is to help the provinces deliver the kinds of social benefits and services they want to deliver but cannot because of the inflexibility of existing arrangements.

We are making real progress, showing that we can work together in putting solid progressive social programs in the hands of Quebecers. Bill C-96 is about continuing this momentum. It is about continuing to work together to clarify the roles of different levels of government and it is about building bridges. Surely this is a better way than talking about imaginary power grabs. Building bridges together is the philosophy. This vision underlies the new Department of Human Resources Development.

Bill C-96 provides the basis for the new department. With the accord and support of the House we can put this legislation in place and move forward.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yves Rocheleau (Trois-Rivières, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to address once again Bill C-96, this time at second reading. This act to establish the Department of Human Resources Development has an extremely negative impact in my riding, since it involves, among other things, a restructuring of the employment centre network across Canada, including in Quebec.

Following that restructuring, there will be 28 regional management centres in Quebec, as well as 78 local centres or sub-offices. What is disturbing for Trois-Rivières and its surrounding region is that the government, in its wisdom, has decided to establish the regional operation centre in Shawinigan, instead of Trois-Rivières.

From now on, Trois-Rivières will be served by a suboffice of the regional centre in Shawinigan. You can understand that this decision is unpopular and also illogical. We strongly hope this is just an idea, but there is every indication that a final decision has been made at the departmental level. That decision is unpopular. Indeed, already, more than 25,000 residents from the Trois-Rivières region have signed a petition in which they express their disagreement and their discontent. Moreover, all the major stakeholders, including MPs and MPPs, the mayor of Trois-Rivières, various community groups, as well as 70 organizations, including some 40 municipalities, have also expressed, in writing or through resolutions, their opposition to the government's intention.

• (1135)

In addition to the employees' union, which is being disregarded in this process, two other organizations, the Fédération de l'âge d'or and the Fédération des caisses populaires of the Mauricie region, co-operated to ensure the success of that petition.

Not only is this decision unpopular, it is also illogical. It is so illogical and it makes so little sense that it even contradicts the criteria defined by the department regarding the selection and the location of these regional management centres. The main criteria, which were based on plain common sense, took into account the number of people concerned, including UI beneficiaries, income security recipients and seniors, because they are greatly affected by this project. These criteria also took into consideration the number of companies and employers hiring people who are UI beneficiaries, at least we hope this is the case, and which are concerned by such a decision and by the current role of the employment centres.

Given the numbers for these groups in the Shawinigan and Trois-Rivières regions, the decision does not make sense and goes against established criteria. Indeed, in terms of numbers, the ratio is two to one in favour of Trois-Rivières for just about